

Foreward: The Development Context

This study falls at the intersection of several key themes or debates in International Development. These include the debate about the role and effectiveness of official international assistance agencies, the body of thought on the micropolitical forces which shape the development assistance process, and the debate over the ecological limits to and sustainability of economic growth. The following sections will review the most important concepts and some of the authors associated with those themes.

1) *What do international donor agencies do, and do they do it well?* Some discussion has been given in the literature to approach taken by international donor agencies to development assistance. For the most part, this discussion has focused on the fact that large governmental and bureaucratic agencies lack the flexibility to adapt to changing conditions and be effective at grassroots-level implementation. In a scathing condemnation of official international development assistance, Korten (1990) asserts that such efforts are defined by the bounds of bureaucratic convenience, and that there has been a strong preference in international assistance for short-term, narrowly-focused, and self-interested efforts.¹ Hellinger et al. (1988), in an assessment of the U.S. Agency for International Development, suggest that even when more farsighted and well-designed approaches emerge, they "face internal structures, operational procedures, and reward systems geared to promote objectives related primarily to expansionary

¹ David C. Korten, Getting to the 21st Century, West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1990, pp. 36-137.

and survival interests of the AID bureaucracy"².

In the context of this criticism and domestic political pressure to re-invent government in accordance with slimmer, private sector-style management, the U. S. Agency for International Development has been demonstrative about its efforts to manage for results and focus on measurable impacts in the developing world. This study will examine the Agency's approach to biodiversity conservation in an effort to see if the aforementioned criticisms remain valid for this sector of assistance activities. It will focus primarily on comparing the biodiversity strategies currently promulgated at the mission-level to what the body of literature suggests about appropriate policy.

While both of the authors mentioned above are critical of official development assistance approaches, they acknowledge that official assistance agencies and donors have shown an increasing trend toward supporting and interacting with NGO's -- a trend both authors would like to see continue and grow. This study will also help to illuminate the ways in which one international assistance agency is interacting with NGO's to preserve biodiversity -- and whether the relationship is likely to be an effective one.

2) *Micropolitics as development substructure and superstructure.* Much of the development literature -- particularly that on rural development -- stresses the need for a micropolitical conceptual approach to development. Such an approach requires close attention to

² Stephen Hellinger et al. (The Development Group for Alternative Policies), Aid for Just Development, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1988, p. 49.

issues of values, interest, and power³ which define both the substructure and superstructure to which projects, interventions, and programs must be molded.

As superstructure, the values, interests, and power relationships represented in international assistance agencies and host country governments define the boundaries of these organizations' approach to development interventions. As noted above, this has been expressed by Hellinger et al. and Korten with respect to macro-approaches of assistance agencies, but authors such as Michael Lipsky have also pointed to the importance of the way bureaucratic interests and values can mold policy implementation at the micro level.⁴

As substructure, values, interests, and power are organizing forces of the social fabric upon which development interventions take place. A range of authors have suggested that relationships of value, interest, and power are often manifested along lines of class (Cancian 1987), caste (Kolenda 1978), gender (Hirschmann 1990, Robertson and Berger 1986, Samarasinghe 1992), and race and ethnicity (Kasfir 1986). The construction of a conceptual framework for this study will illuminate the micropolitical considerations (superstructural and substructural) which emerge from the literature as being most important for biodiversity interventions in developing tropical countries. As well, several carefully chosen case studies will provide a picture of the ability of an international donor agency to grapple with these kinds of micropolitical issues in the design and implementation of its programs.

David Goldsworthy, "Thinking Politically about Development", *Development and Change*, v. 19, 1988, pp. 507-508.

⁴ Michael Lipsky, "The Rationing of Services in Street-Level Bureaucracies", *Street-Level Bureaucracy*, New York: Sage Foundation, 1980, pp. 87-104.

3) *Limits to Growth and the Concept of Sustainability.* Much of the literature is concerned with the ecological limits to growth and the related concept of the environmental sustainability of economic development. Model simulations conducted by Meadows et al. in the early 1970's suggested that there might be ecological limits to strategies of growth-led development:

If the present growth trends in world population, industrialization, pollution, food production, and resource depletion continue unchanged, the limits to growth on this planet will be reached sometime within the next 100 years. The most probable result will be a sudden and uncontrollable decline in both population and industrial capacity.⁵

Biodiversity represents one of the most important ecological thresholds to the expansion of the human economy (subsistence and surplus). Yet the relationship of developing economies to mechanisms of biodiversity loss is complex and poorly understood. This study will review and synthesize the body of scholarship on this relationship to construct a conceptual framework within which to more carefully examine interventions which aim to slow or reverse biodiversity loss.

Related to the concept of ecological thresholds is the concept of sustainability. Whereas Meadows et al. focused on the strict ecological sustainability of growth, usage of the term "sustainability" within the development literature has become somewhat broader than this, and includes some notion of the permanence of development programs and interventions (financially, technically, culturally, and environmentally). Arnold (1989) has argued that the term has become so inclusive as to endanger its operational usefulness.⁶ It may be too generalized to be a practical guide to action, he argues, or it may take such an interconnected view of problems that it inspires

⁵ Donella Meadows et al., *Beyond the Limits*, Post Mills, VT: Chelsea Green, 1992, p. xiii.

⁶ Steven H. Arnold, "Sustainable Development: A Solution to the Development Puzzle?", *Development* 1989, no. 2/3, 1989, pp. 21-24

a sort of overwhelmed paralysis.

This study will attempt to synthesize perspectives from the literature about what the most critical elements of development sustainability are, from the perspective of preserving the earth's natural genetic heritage. The application of these perspectives, as part of a conceptual analytical framework, to several case studies of USAID mission-level biodiversity activities will yield a picture of how one of the major international development assistant organizations deals (or doesn't) with operationalizing sustainability in the forests and in the fields.

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⁷ Ibid, p. 24.

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